

## **Testimony in support of HB 6759**

Submitted By:  
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Good afternoon Sen. McCrory, Rep. Curry, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Lindsay Therian. I live in Colchester and I am a Preschool Director.

I am testifying in support of HB 6759 An Act Concerning Early Childhood. I want to thank you for recognizing in section 1 of this bill that compensation for early educators is the issue facing the early care and education sector. Implementing the OEC Compensation Scale would finally pay early educators wages comparable to public school staff with the same degrees.

This is an issue that is very important to me. The needs of children are greater now than ever before. Hiring and retaining an experienced, educated workforce is essential to providing children with a quality early childhood experience.

As a NAEYC accredited program that accepts school readiness funding, our preschool staff are required to have higher education degrees in early childhood education. It has become increasingly difficult to recruit and retain educators with degrees to work in full day programs at the rates that we can afford to pay them.

Since we are seeking degreed professionals, we are often competing with public schools for staff members. Our teachers are expected to complete the same duties as public school teachers. They plan lessons and curriculum around the CT Early Learning and Development Standards. They assess children using the CT DOTS, and complete written assessment reports and conference with parents. They screen children for developmental delays and refer them to special education if necessary. However, our experienced teachers are making roughly \$7,000 a year less than their public school counterparts.

Additionally, as a year-round full day program that serves working families we need to hire staff that are able to work from 6:30AM-6:00PM, all year long. We are there for families on no-school days, snow days, school vacations, and summer breaks. Meanwhile, the public school system is able to offer their teachers a 7 hour work day, summers off, and higher wages.

In the past year I have had a staff turnover rate of 60-70%. Interviewing new staff members is frustrating, with a high rate of no-shows, and very little interest in positions. We have lost experienced educators and had promising interviewees take positions in other fields or public

schools for a higher wage and less demanding schedules. We need to entice new graduates to seek degrees in early childhood. We need to recruit high quality, experienced educators with the experience and knowledge to support the ever-increasing needs of the children we serve.

The only way to do that is to raise wages. Our staff need to be able to afford groceries, pay their bills, and support their families. Many of them need to pay back the loans they took to be able to access the college education that was required of them for their position. That is why support from the state for wage increases is essential. Without it, we will have to continue to increase the financial burden on working families. If we don't make a change soon we will continue to lose our qualified and experienced educators, leaving our children in the care of younger, less educated, and less experienced staff members.

As a provider of school readiness the stagnant funding is an issue. Costs for programs have increased, as well as staff wages. The funding that we receive for our school-day students doesn't even cover the cost of both of their teachers, never mind the other costs of operating their classroom.

What is missing from this bill is how it will be paid for. I urge you to support increasing payments to the state funded early care programs and the creation of a wage equity fund similar to what was created in Washington DC to increase wages for early educators without adding to the child care cost burden that families already face.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify and I am happy to answer any questions.